

# QUICKSTART®

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## A Glass Act

French firm settles in Georgia with a plant to decorate perfume bottles

A rural Georgia county is getting an economic boost from a company originally founded to help restore the economy of 17th-century France.

Created by Louis XIV to train glass artisans for the Palace of Versailles' Hall of Mirrors, Saint-Gobain recently opened a plant in Hancock County to decorate glass perfume bottles. The new, 65,000-sq.-ft. facility is located in Sparta and is providing 200 much-needed jobs to an area hard-hit by the decline of the textile industry.

Vying against a town in Mexico for the plant site, Sparta and Hancock County worked diligently to attract Saint-Gobain. The community was able to outmatch the competition with construction funds from the

OneGeorgia Authority and workforce training from Quick Start.

"The community support we received was a key element in our decision to invest in Sparta, and continues to reinforce our reasons for choosing this community," said Plant Manager Tristan Thommasson at the Oct. 17 ribbon-cutting ceremony.

In addition to Quick Start and Sandersville Technical College, he gave special nods of thanks to Betty Hill, Hancock County Commission chairperson; state Rep. Sistie Hudson;



Molten glass transforms into decorative bottles at Saint-Gobain's Covington plant.

R.K. Sehgal, Georgia Department of Industry, Trade and Tourism commissioner; and the GDITT's Deborah Lohnes, whom

*"The community support we received was a key element in our decision to invest in Sparta ..."*

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Saint-Gobain plant manager

Thommasson cited as "a real asset."

Transportation was also in Sparta's favor in landing the plant, since Saint-Gobain's glass-blowing facility in Covington manufactures the bottles that are decorated at the

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Left: Saint-Gobain Plant Manager Tristan Thommasson explains the decorating process to Secretary of State Cathy Cox during a tour of the new Sparta facility. Center: Patricia Ward inspects a perfume bottle. Right: Decoration Director Rita Poole chats with Sandersville Tech VP of economic development Leigh Evans at the plant's opening celebration.





**Top:** Cutting the ribbon are, from left, state Sen. Faye Smith; GDITT Commissioner R.K. Sehgal; Emory Grier, chair of the Hancock County Development Authority; Sparta Mayor William Evans; state Rep. Sistie Hudson; Betty Hill, chair of the Hancock County Commission; Secretary of State Cathy Cox; and Tristan Thommasson, Saint-Gobain plant manager. **Center:** Bottles made for high-end perfumers are on display. **Bottom:** At the Covington plant, Donita Hardy checks bottles for structural or cosmetic defects. If any are found, the bottle is ground up and reused in the glass-making process.

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new plant. Yet another advantage was the quality of the workforce.

“We had the technology,” said Thommasson. “Now we have the people who will make the difference with the competition.”

The Sparta plant has hired a number of people who had worked for years in the area’s now-closed textile mills. Decoration Director Rita Poole commended their work ethics. “Many of our employees were

inspectors at the sewing plants,” she said, “so they already had good eye-to-hand coordination.”

Inspection is a key function at the decorating plant, where the etching of designs and logos must be perfect for customers that include Lancome, Calvin Klein, Estee Lauder, Victoria’s Secret, Chanel and Bath & Body Works. The glass bottles are dipped in solution to give a frosted, satin finish, and brand names are applied by a screen-printing process. Inspectors look for such defects as broken letters or ink that’s too heavy.

To help the plant’s inspectors, technicians and packers increase their skill level, Quick Start and Sandersville Tech are providing training in productivity enhancement, manufacturing skills and technology, computer skills, and leadership and human resource development. Job-specific training is taking place for the decorating machines, the frosting operation, the screen preparation room, and ink mixing and color matching. Pre-employment training is also aiding the plant’s hiring efforts.

“We are very proud of our Sparta employees,” Thommasson said. “Our French decoration plant is the best in Europe. Our goal here is simple — to be the best decoration plant in North America.” The plant has room to expand its capacity as the Covington plant expands, making more bottles for the Sparta plant to decorate.

The Covington plant began production in 1996 and employs 130 people. Saint-Gobain provides jobs for about 1,000 Georgians, with manufacturing facilities in Athens (insulation), Peachtree City (residential roofing products), Madison (fabricated glass) and Social Circle (vinyl fencing and siding).

But the jobs provided in Hancock County are especially significant, as Saint-Gobain is helping a rural area redefine its economy from textiles to a broader base. Secretary of State

## About Saint-Gobain

**Country of origin:** France

**Founded:** 1665

**Number of employees worldwide:** 170,500

**Number of countries it operates in:** 46

**Manufacturing output:** abrasives, building materials, high-performance plastics, industrial ceramics, glass containers

**Number of bottles, flasks and jars made annually:** 30 billion

**Name of perfume bottle subsidiary in Georgia:** Saint-Gobain Desjonquères

**Significance of the name**

“Desjonquères”: reflects the parent company’s 1972 acquisition of a firm founded by noted glassmaker Henri Desjonquères, who first mechanized the glass-blowing process shortly after World War II



Cathy Cox, special guest speaker at the opening celebration, expressed her appreciation to the company by drawing on the memory of the county’s namesake, the first signer of the Declaration of Independence.

“This facility will contribute to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” she said. “John Hancock would be proud, and so are we.”